

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Office  
May 12, 2009

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**THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH REMINDS FLORIDIANS OF THE RISKS  
ASSOCIATED WITH RAW OYSTER CONSUMPTION**

**TALLAHASSEE** – The Florida Department of Health (DOH) warns Floridians with certain health conditions to avoid consuming raw oysters, which often harbor the bacteria *Vibrio vulnificus* that may cause serious illness. *Vibrio vulnificus* is a naturally occurring bacteria in the warm waters of the Gulf coast, particularly during the summer months.

While otherwise healthy persons eating raw oysters with this bacterium are less susceptible to becoming ill, at-risk individuals are more likely to become extremely ill or potentially die. Those most at-risk for developing serious illness from *Vibrio vulnificus* include heavy drinkers with liver damage or individuals with liver disease. Other at-risk conditions include hemochromatosis (iron overload), diabetes, cancer, stomach disorders or any illness or treatment that weakens the immune system. People in these high-risk groups are also at risk of illness if they have wounds, cuts or scratches and wade in estuarine areas or seawater where the bacteria might be present.

Thoroughly cooking oysters, either by frying, stewing or roasting, eliminates harmful bacteria and viruses in the meat. Consuming raw oysters that have undergone a post-harvest treatment process to eliminate the bacteria can also reduce the risk of illness.

Initial symptoms of *Vibrio vulnificus* infection can include mild nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, followed by distinctive swollen skin lesions and septicemia (blood poisoning). Individuals experiencing these symptoms after consuming raw oysters should contact a physician immediately for diagnosis and antibiotic treatment.

To date, one death has been reported in 2009, attributed to raw oyster consumption and there has been one wound infection. In 2008, DOH investigated 15 cases of *Vibrio vulnificus*, five of which resulted in death. Eight cases were attributed to wounds (two of these died), and seven to raw oyster consumption (three of these died).

DOH promotes, protects and improves the health of all people in Florida. For more information about DOH's Food and Water Borne Disease Program, visit [www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/medicine/foodsurveillance/index.html](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/medicine/foodsurveillance/index.html). Additional information is also available by visiting the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference website at [www.issc.org/Education/VibrioVulnificus.aspx](http://www.issc.org/Education/VibrioVulnificus.aspx) or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at [www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease\\_listing/vibriov\\_gi.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease_listing/vibriov_gi.html).